



Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance

212-298-9111

www.poppainc.org

FAQs

What is POPPA?

POPPA is an independent, not-for-profit agency, offering entirely confidential services through trained volunteer officers from the NYPD. POPPA provides peer support for New York City police officers experiencing personal or professional problems, such as traumatic stress, personal stress, depression or anxiety, alcohol abuse, or family problems.

Officers calling POPPA's HelpLine can meet with a fellow officer immediately or the next day. If needed, POPPA can refer an officer to a mental health professional from POPPA's clinical panel and the officer's own insurance plan, while continuing to provide peer support. POPPA's services are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, to any New York City police officer who voluntarily requests them.

Although POPPA started as a suicide HelpLine in response to an N.Y.P.D. suicide crisis, POPPA has developed into a multi-faceted peer based assistance agency engaged in education and outreach, trauma response, resiliency maintenance and support, and continues to operate the 24 hour HelpLine. All of POPPA's services provided are confidential, including all peer based support services and clinical care. For all peer based services, the volunteer Peer Support Officers report only to POPPA, not the NYPD. Thus, both officer seeking assistance and the peer providing assistance feel safe and have no fear that anything discussed can be shared with the Department.

Why POPPA?

AFTER 26 NYPD SUICIDES in a two year period from mid-1993 to mid-1995, alarms went off in the NYPD, the Mayor's Office, and City Council and in the press. After investigations and research, City Council hearings determined that officers needed a program that was confidential and independent of the NYPD that they could turn to on a voluntarily basis. For officers to voluntarily seek assistance before the suicidal crisis, it was concluded that officers would trust only a volunteer peer trained to provide confidential support and when needed, a referral to professional treatment that was also confidential and not recorded in their department record.

POPPA offers NYPD officers a critical service available nowhere else. All of its clients voluntarily seek its assistance, which POPPA offers on a strictly confidential basis. While the NYPD is highly supportive of POPPA's work and POPPA is largely staffed by NYPD volunteers, POPPA operates entirely independently from the Police Department. A client's relationship with POPPA is never divulged to the NYPD. This structure, along with staffing by fellow cops, overcomes major obstacles to officers seeking help. POPPA knows about the stresses cops experience, problems and issues they face, and ways to get them effective help.

Who staffs POPPA?

A corps of 200 police officers, all volunteers, carries out POPPA's primary services. After screening by POPPA personnel and clinicians, they are trained to develop the understanding and skills required for assisting fellow officers. These volunteers, called Peer Support Officers or PSOs, help a fellow officer to recognize signs of stress related problems, how to cope, and when and how to seek professional assistance. They help fellow officers understand that to reach out for assistance with personal or professional stress problems is not a sign of weakness but is a sign of strength. POPPA PSO's help fellow officers to identify their own stress related problems and to choose a solution that is right for them, including a referral to professional assistance when needed.

Some 100 or so mental health professionals from NYC and the surrounding counties are affiliated with POPPA including psychologists, social workers, addictions counselors and psychiatrists. These professionals are screened and trained to work with police officers to meet their specific cultural and professional needs. They assist in POPPA's training and various programs and they provide treatment for clients referred to them by POPPA.

POPPA administrative staff includes:

- Executive Director and Founder, oversees all of POPPA's operations
- Assistant Director, supports the work of the Director, oversees the development of the Retiree HelpLine, including the development of a national retiree officer network
- Director of Development/Office Manager conducts all business administrative responsibilities.
- Director of Client Services and Case Manager, who provide oversight of the clinical panel and monitoring and support of officers in treatment
- Medical Advisor, assists with training and support of peers and clinicians, program development, and assures high quality of care to officers
- Operations Director, oversees and coordinates the volunteer peers and peer based initiatives and acts as liaison with the N.Y.C.P D.

Where does POPPA operate?

While POPPA headquarters are located in lower Manhattan, POPPA operates wherever its needed most. A police officer who calls the POPPA HelpLine can meet with a trained volunteer officer at any location that satisfies the caller's needs for a timely, confidential, face-to-face talk. First meetings often take place in a car, diner, or coffee shop. Peer Support Officers and their clients later work out times and places for future communications.

What Are POPPA's Programs?

- 24 Hour HelpLine.

The 24 Hour HelpLine is POPPA's initial and cornerstone program, where an officer reaches out in their time of need. An officer calls 888-COPSCOP and leaves a message on a digital answering machine. The trained volunteer Peer Support Officer calls back within 15 minutes, discusses the situation with the caller, providing preliminary support and guidance. Usually this results in a face to face meeting, where the officer in distress and the PSO talk further, to clarify

the type of problem(s), extent, and the best way that POPPA can help, usually with a referral for confidential treatment.

- Education and Outreach

POPPA PSOs and clinicians have conducted a variety of outreaches and educational sessions over the years: new recruits or officers in promotional training classes at the Police Academy; at Ground Zero, the morgues, and the Staten Island Landfill operation after 9/11/01; at all commands and all shifts during Project Liberty POPPA, which extended the outreach, education, and screening for stress related symptoms to 2 ½ years post 9/11/01. POPPA has learned that ongoing outreach and education is necessary for officers to remain mindful of their human side that is often affected by the stressors and critical incidents they may face on a daily basis.

- Trauma Response Teams

NYPD officers face traumatic events hundreds of times over their careers. The NYPD notifies POPPA Trauma Response Teams (TRT) on call about certain critical events (such as job related shootings; motor vehicle accidents with serious injuries or fatalities, death or serious injuries to a fellow officer, officer suicide). POPPA sends trained PSOs to the command affected by the incident. These peers conduct a preliminary assessment of who was affected and how, what supports they may need, and they conduct informal confidential peer support. When needed, a peer lead clinician assisted group crisis intervention is conducted at the POPPA Center within a week or so of the event.

- Retiree HelpLine

POPPA has long recognized that officers remain affected by traumatic stress after they retire, and that they lose many of the individual and cultural supports that helped them cope during their careers. Similar to the primary HelpLine, retired officers can call a dedicated retired officers' helpline to receive phone based peer support and referral to professional assistance. Currently POPPA is expanding these services nationally outside the NYPD to offer assistance to any retired officer from any department.

- Resiliency Support Program (RSP)

As the first line of defense in the war on terrorism, police officers must remain at peak physical and psychological performance. While police officers are more resilient and resourceful than most others, officers can overlook personal impact of stress as they focus on responding to the next emergency. POPPA has been conducting a pilot Resiliency Support Program to help officers to: identify their own stress levels; talk about the personal impact of recent stress from their professional and personal lives; learn from fellow officers that they are not alone in experiencing stress; and to learn how to use their own personal strengths or resiliency to cope with stress and remain effective in their jobs. Participants in this pilot program uniformly report that they find this program helpful and recommend that it be a part of required annual training of every officer.

- Military Returnee Program

POPPA has established a re-orientation program for its over 4,000 returning police personnel that have been deployed one or more times. Additionally there is an ongoing support group service available for all police officer military personnel.

Do POPPA's programs work?

Since 1996, over 12,000 calls have been made to the HelpLine. Initially, about 10-15% of calls resulted in a referral for clinical services. Over the last few years, about 40% of calls result in a clinical referral. In addition, a group from New York University conducted a survey of internal

and external peer support services in the NYPD. They found that over 90% of the respondents who used POPPA services would recommend POPPA services to a fellow officer. POPPA conducts anonymous exit surveys after TRT and RSP. Over 85% of the participants reports that the intervention was helpful to them and that they would recommend the intervention to fellow officers.

Since POPPA's inception in 1996, the suicide rate in the NYPD has dropped about 40% from 24/100,000 to 14/100,000 and this drop has been sustained for nine years past 9/11/01 with no appreciable increase in suicides. Most importantly, over 80 officers' lives have been saved. These are officers who state that they would certainly have committed suicide if POPPA's services were not available to them.

Can POPPA's Programs Be Adapted for the US Military?

POPPA leadership strongly believes that its model can be adapted and applied to the US Military. It took the suicide crisis of the mid 1990s for forward thinkers in the NYPD and POPPA to create an independent, confidential, peer based assistance program for the NYPD. This crisis was strikingly similar to the suicide crisis faced by the US military. Police officers and warriors share more similarities than differences. Over the last few years, POPPA has observed an increase in calls to the HelpLine from officers with previous military experience, particularly from Iraq or Afghanistan. POPPA has conducted RSP (Resiliency Support Program) groups tailored to the needs of military transitioning back to work in the NYPD. Participants report that the groups are helpful. If NYPD Officers from elite units such as Emergency Services, Aviation, Harbor, Counter-Terrorism or Specialized Detective units can safely seek peer support and clinical assistance from POPPA, then it's highly likely that the model can be adapted to the US military.

Over the last two years, POPPA leadership has attended many meetings with military leadership to discuss the feasibility of adapting the POPPA model for active duty military and the military reserve. While there will need to be adaptations to address the specific needs of the warrior and the military mission, POPPA leadership strongly believes that this model can be adapted and applied to the US Military Active Duty and Reserve Forces.

For More Information:

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